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Godność i inkluzja: zapewnienie praw dzieci z mniejszości we współczesnych systemach edukacyjnych

Dignity and Inclusion: Ensuring the Rights of Minority Children in the Contemporary Educational Systems

STRESZCZENIE: W artykule tym zbadano obecny stan praw dzieci mniejszości w edukacji, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Albanii. Podkreśla się znaczenie godności, równości i szacunku dla różnorodności kulturowej jako podstawowych filarów systemów edukacji inkluzywnej. Pomimo międzynarodowych konwencji opowiadających się za równym dostępem do edukacji, dzieci mniejszości często napotykać bariery strukturalne, które podważają ich szanse edukacyjne i rozwój psychospołeczny. W artykule zostały ukazane te wyzwania i zaproponowano praktyczne rozwiązania, mające na celu zwiększenie udziału dzieci mniejszości w edukacji powszechnej. Kluczowe strategie obejmują wdrażanie programów edukacji dwujęzycznej, integrację programów nauczania uwzględniających różnice kulturowe oraz kompleksowe szkolenie nauczycieli mające na celu wspieranie inkluzywnego środowiska edukacyjnego. W artykule argumentuje się, że dzięki tym środkom dzieci mniejszości mogą być upoważnione do osiągnięcia sukcesu akademickiego przy jednoczesnym zachowaniu swojej tożsamości kulturowej, co ostatecznie promuje większą spójność społeczną i szacunek dla różnorodności.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: prawa dzieci mniejszości, godność, włączenie, Albania, instrumenty międzynarodowe, programy edukacji dwujęzycznej

ABSTRACT: This article explores the current state of minority children’s rights in education, with a particular focus on Albania. It emphasises the importance of dignity, equality, and respect for cultural diversity as fundamental pillars of the inclusive educational systems. Despite international conventions advocating for equal access to education, minority children often face structural barriers that undermine their educational opportunities and psychosocial development. This article examines these challenges and proposes practical solutions to enhance minority children’s participation in the mainstream education. The key strategies include the implementation of bilingual education programs, the integration of culturally sensitive curricula, and comprehensive teacher training aimed at fostering an inclusive learning environment. Through these measures, the article argues that minority children can be empowered to achieve academic success while preserving their cultural identity, ultimately promoting greater social cohesion and respect for diversity.

KEYWORDS: minority children’s rights, dignity, inclusion, Albania, international instruments, bilingual education programs

Introduction

In Albania, there are nine national minorities officially recognised, comprising Greek, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Aromanian, Roma, Egyptian, Serbian, Montenegrin, and Bosniak communities¹. This law defines a national minority as “a group of Albanian citizens residing in the territory of the Republic of Albania who have established long-standing and stable ties to the Albanian state, possess distinct cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, or traditional characteristics, and demonstrate a willingness to express, preserve, and further develop their unique identity collectively.”

The legal protection of minority children in education is shaped by both domestic legislation and international commitments. Minority rights protection is guided by the objective criteria – such as distinct ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic characteristics – and the subjective criteria, which recognise an individual’s expressed will

¹ Article 3 of Law No. 96/2012, dated 09.11.2017, “On the Protection of National Minorities in the Republic of Albania”.

to maintain their identity². While Albania has made progress in recognising and safeguarding these rights, challenges remain both in the legal framework and in its practical implementation. This analysis examines Albania's legal provisions for minority children's education, its international obligations, and the persistent barriers to ensuring full protection in practice.

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping children's identities, particularly for those belonging to national minorities. Schools serve not only as sites of academic instruction but also as spaces where cultural and linguistic identities are either affirmed or marginalised. In Albania, ensuring that minority children's educational rights are upheld is both a legal obligation and a moral imperative – one that strengthens the national cohesion through the promotion of diversity³. However, despite Albania's commitment to international conventions and national laws, significant obstacles persist in the educational system⁴, limiting the full realisation of these rights⁵.

Methodology

This study employs a multi-level empirical research approach, utilising qualitative methods to provide an interpretive analysis of the rights afforded to minority children and their implementation

² Council of Europe, (2021), *Fifth Report submitted by Albania ACFC/SR/V(2021)002 Pursuant to Article 25, paragraph 2 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities – received on 5 May 2021*, <https://rm.coe.int/5th-sr-albania-al/1680a2614d>, [Retrieved: April 2025].

³ Article 10 of Law No. 69/2012, dated 21.06.2012, "On the pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania", as amended.

⁴ European Commission, (2018), *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A Credible Enlargement Perspective for and Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans*, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-01/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf, [Retrieved: April 2025].

⁵ H. Miço, *Legal issues of Roma inclusion in education in Western Balkan countries*, ATEE Annual Conference 2023 "Teacher Education on the Move" 2024, s. 136-152, <http://dx.doi.org/10.21862/atee.2023>

in practice. Through qualitative research, we examine the discourse of Albania's legal framework, comparing it with the lived experiences of national minorities in relation to the enforcement of their human rights protections. A comprehensive review of the legal framework governing the rights of minority children in Albania's education system serves as the foundation for analysing the barriers they face. By systematically assessing each relevant legal provision, we identify legislative gaps, service shortcomings, and the broader implications of these barriers on minority children's education. This analysis is designed to be both critical and solution-oriented, offering concrete recommendations for addressing deficiencies in the legal and institutional framework rather than focusing solely on theoretical discussions.

1. Albania domestic legal framework

Albania's domestic legal framework establishes strong protections for the education of minority children, with the Constitution and key legislative instruments affirming fundamental rights. The Constitution of the Republic of Albania guarantees education for all citizens, including national minorities. Article 20 explicitly affirms the right of national minorities to preserve and develop their ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic identity, ensuring access to education in their mother tongue where applicable. This provision highlights the state's commitment to linguistic and cultural preservation as integral to minority rights. Additionally, Article 57 enshrines the universal right to education for all Albanian citizens, mandating that primary education should be both compulsory and free of charge. By ensuring that minority children have equal access to education, this provision reinforces the principles of inclusivity and equal opportunity within the national educational system⁶.

The law on the Protection of National Minorities further strengthens the constitutional safeguards for minority children's education by addressing their specific linguistic and cultural needs. This legal framework guarantees the right to education in minority

⁶ Articles 20 and 57 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, approved by law No. 8417, dated 21.10.1998 of the People's Assembly.

languages, particularly in regions with significant minority populations⁷. In addition to providing instruction in their mother tongue, the law mandates the integration of minority histories, cultures, and traditions into the curriculum, fostering a more inclusive and representative educational framework. By promoting bilingual and multicultural education, the law integrates minority languages and cultures into the broader educational system, fostering an inclusive learning environment⁸. This approach not only preserves minority identities but also facilitates the development of linguistic competencies in both the minority language and the national language⁹, Albanian, thereby enhancing social cohesion and educational equity¹⁰.

The Law on Pre-University Education (2012) safeguards the educational rights of minority children at both primary and secondary levels. In regions with a significant minority population, schools are mandated to provide instruction in the minority language alongside Albanian. This provision reinforces linguistic and cultural diversity by integrating minority languages into mainstream education while ensuring proficiency in Albanian, thereby balancing cultural preservation with national integration¹¹. Collectively, these legal provisions establish a comprehensive framework for protecting and promoting the educational rights of minority children in Albania. By ensuring access to education that respects linguistic and cultural identities while fostering integration into the national system, these laws contribute to an inclusive and cohesive educational environment¹².

⁷ Article 13 of Law No. 96/2012, dated 09.11.2017, "On the Protection of National Minorities in the Republic of Albania".

⁸ K. Giakoumis, *The policy of non-discrimination and the protection of minority cultural heritage in Albania*, "International Journal of Cultural Policy" 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2019.1567722>, [Retrieved: April 2025].

⁹ Article 13 of Law No. 96/2012, dated 09.11.2017, "On the Protection of National Minorities in the Republic of Albania".

¹⁰ B. Feta, *The Protection of Minority Rights in Albania through EU's Enlargement Conditionality 2020*, <https://www.eupolicyhub.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Policy-Briefs-Publication-Bledi-en-final.pdf>

¹¹ Article 10 of Law No. 69/2012, dated 21.06.2012, "On the pre-university education system in the Republic of Albania", as amended.

¹² H. Miço, N. Mulleti, *Social Inclusion in Education for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees: A Human Right or a Hope?* "EUWEB Legal Essays Global & International Perspectives" 2023, Issue 1, pp. 32-47, DOI: 10.1400/290935.

Despite the legal framework ensuring minority language education, significant gaps remain in its implementation. In certain regions where minority children reside, the absence of the mother-tongue instruction contradicts the intended protections of the law. The shortage of educational resources, such as textbooks in minority languages and adequately trained bilingual educators, further restricts minority children's access to education that reflects their linguistic and cultural identities. Moreover, while constitutional provisions guarantee education in minority languages, practical challenges persist, particularly in urban areas where smaller minority populations are dispersed¹³, making it difficult to establish dedicated minority-language programs¹⁴.

2. International framework for the protection of minorities

In addition to its domestic legal framework, Albania is bound by various international human rights treaties that safeguard the educational rights of minority children. These international obligations reinforce the country's commitment to ensuring inclusive and equitable education, particularly for children from minority communities, and they provide a broader, more rigorous framework for assessing Albania's compliance with the global standards.

One of the most significant international instruments in this regard is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Albania ratified in 1992¹⁵. CRC is a landmark international treaty that compels state parties to safeguard the rights of all children, including their right to education, without discrimination on any grounds, such as ethnicity, language, or cultural background. Article 30 is of particular

¹³ Ombudsman of Albania, (2014), *Special Report. On Minority Rights in Albania*, <https://www.avokatipopullit.gov.al/media/manager/website/reports/SPECIAL%20REPORT%20ON%20MINORITY%20RIGHTS.pdf>

¹⁴ B. Fuqi, *Political Rights of Minorities in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. A Comparative Analysis with EU Law*, "Master's theses, Central European University" 2023, https://www.etd.ceu.edu/2023/fuqi_borana.pdf

¹⁵ United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, November 20. 1989, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

significance for minority as it explicitly guarantees their right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their religion, and to use their language. This provision highlights the critical role of education in preserving cultural identity and promoting linguistic diversity. By ratifying the CRC, Albania assumes a legal obligation to ensure that minority children have access to an education system that not only acknowledges but actively supports and promotes their cultural and linguistic heritage¹⁶. This duty extends beyond ensuring formal access to education; it requires the creation of inclusive learning environments that affirm cultural identity and provide equitable opportunities for all children, irrespective of their minority status.

Another key international instrument is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [ICCPR], to which Albania is a signatory¹⁷. Article 27 of the ICCPR obliges states to respect and protect the rights of individuals belonging to ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their religion, and to use their own language¹⁸. This provision is particularly relevant in the field of education, as it underscores the significance of linguistic rights within the learning environment.

Although the ICCPR does not offer a precise definition of the term *national minority*, it is generally understood to encompass groups characterised by ethnic, religious, or linguistic distinctions. For Albania, this implies a clear responsibility to ensure that children from minority communities have access to education in their mother tongue as an essential part of their educational experience. Such a commitment reflects the principle of substantive equality, which moves beyond ensuring physical access to schools and emphasises

¹⁶ R. Ludwikowski, *Fundamental Constitutional Rights in the New Constitutions of Eastern and Central Europe*, "Cardozo of Int'l & Comp. Law" 1995, Vol. 3(73), <https://scholarship.law.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1347&context=scholar>

¹⁷ United Nations, (1966), *International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, art. 27, adopted on 16 December 1966, by General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

¹⁸ U. Barten, *Article 27 ICCPR: A First Point of Reference*, "The United Nations Declaration on Minorities", Publisher Brill | Nijhoff 2015, pp. 46-65, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004251564_004

meaningful participation in education. This involves enabling children to learn in a language they understand and within a cultural framework that affirms their identity. In practical terms, this requires the state to provide sufficient support for schools in minority-populated areas, including the allocation of resources for mother-tongue instruction and the expansion of access to such opportunities across the country.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, adopted by the Council of Europe and ratified by Albania in 2000, plays a pivotal role in defining the country's obligations toward the education of minority children¹⁹. The Convention underscores the responsibility of states to facilitate education in minority languages, particularly in regions where minority populations are substantial. Importantly, it goes beyond the provision of instruction in minority languages by also advocating for the promotion of knowledge about minority languages and cultures within the broader society. This dual emphasis contributes to the social cohesion and fosters mutual understanding among different communities.

To comply with these standards, Albania must ensure that minority children have access to education that not only accommodates their linguistic needs but also incorporates culturally relevant content, thereby supporting inclusion and reinforcing a sense of identity. Furthermore, the Convention highlights the critical role of teacher preparation and the development of educational materials in minority languages. This calls for a comprehensive and systemic approach to minority education—one in which educators are adequately trained to teach in minority languages and schools are equipped with textbooks and learning resources that reflect the cultural and linguistic heritage of minority communities²⁰.

While Albania has made notable progress in harmonising its domestic legal framework with international standards, important

¹⁹ Council of Europe, *The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*. "European Treaty Series" 1995, No. 157, <https://rm.coe.int/168007cdac>

²⁰ L. Djordjević, Z. Zaimi, *Commentary: The Law on Protection of National Minorities in the Republic of Albania*, "Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe" 2019, Vol 18, No 1, pp. 53-69, <https://www.ecmi.de/fileadmin/downloads/publications/JEMIE/2019/Djordjevic.pdf>

gaps remain. One such area is the full adoption of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages²¹ Although Albania is a signatory to the Charter, it has yet to ratify it fully – a step that would entail more robust commitments to the promotion and protection of minority languages across all levels of education, from pre-school through higher education. The Charter sets out detailed measures to preserve linguistic diversity, including the obligation to provide instruction in minority languages throughout various stages of schooling. Full ratification and implementation would significantly enhance Albania's commitment to the educational rights of minority children. It would ensure continuity in the mother-tongue instruction beyond the primary level, enabling students to pursue secondary and higher education in their native languages and fostering both linguistic equity and cultural inclusion.

However, Albania's implementation of minority language education lags behind that of its regional neighbours, such as North Macedonia and Serbia. Both countries have established more comprehensive frameworks to support linguistic diversity in education—North Macedonia, for instance, offers extensive bilingual instruction in Albanian and Turkish²², while Serbia promotes education in minority languages such as Hungarian and Bosnian²³. In contrast, Albania's continued failure to fully ratify the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* represents a missed opportunity to reinforce its commitment to the educational rights of minority communities and to align more closely with regional best practices²⁴.

Albania's international commitments – particularly under the CRC, ICCPR, and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities – establish a robust framework for safeguarding the educational rights of minority children. These instruments collectively oblige the state to ensure access to education in minority languages and to provide a culturally responsive learning

²¹ Council of Europe, *The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, "European Treaty Series" 1992, No. 148, <https://rm.coe.int/1680695175>

²² Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, (1991), *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia*, No. 52/91.

²³ Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, (2006), *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 98/06, https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/ustav_republike_srbije.html

²⁴ H. Miço, *Legal issues of Roma*, op. cit., s. 142.

environment that affirms and nurtures minority identities. Full ratification of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* would further strengthen this legal and policy framework, enhancing Albania's capacity to deliver inclusive and equitable education for all communities. However, translating these international obligations into effective practice remains a key challenge, requiring more consistent implementation and stronger monitoring mechanisms to ensure that minority children can fully benefit from the rights enshrined in both domestic and international law.

3. Identity and the rights of minority children

3.1. Cultural Identity

Cultural identity forms the foundation of a nation or a group of people with shared heritage and common traits in language, culture, and history. In Albania, the presence of several national minorities contributes to a broader framework of multiculturalism, expressed through the unique traditions, languages, and cultural expressions of each community. However, multi-ethnic environments frequently encounter the challenges of official monoculturalism, which can undermine minority rights and limit the visibility of cultural diversity in public life²⁵. Cultural identity is best understood through two key dimensions: cultural identity endorsement—the recognition and affirmation of ethnic and racial identities – and the degree to which individuals perceive multiple cultural influences as integrated into a cohesive whole²⁶.

²⁵ Council of Europe, European Union, (2010), *Cultural diversity and minorities*, “Mosaic The training kit for Euro-Mediterranean youth work”, F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, <http://book.coe.int>

²⁶ A. Meca, K. Allison, B. Cruz, A. Wright, M. Gonzales-Backen, M. Scurry, *Cultural identity development among ethnicracial minorities: An examination of ethnic-racial identity, national identity, and biculturalism*, “Encyclopedia of Child and Adolescent Health” 2022, Vol. 2, pp 79-902, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818872-9.00178-3>

Within this context, the Law on the Protection of National Minorities in the Republic of Albania (2017)²⁷ explicitly seeks to safeguard the cultural identity of national minorities. According to the law, persons belonging to national minorities have, in accordance with the provisions of Article 2 of this law, the right to celebrate events related to the promotion of their distinct cultural identity. While national minorities are formally recognised and allowed to observe their traditional holidays, the Albanian state does not include any of these celebrations in the official national calendar. Consequently, children from minority communities do not yet have the right to celebrate their traditional holidays as recognised public holidays – reflecting the ongoing tension between legal guarantees of cultural identity and their full implementation in the public policy and practice.

This lack of recognition for minority cultural festivities underscores the persistent challenges in fully integrating minority rights into the broader societal and institutional frameworks – especially within education and public life. Although Albania formally acknowledges the distinct cultural identities of its national minorities, the omission of their traditional holidays from the official national calendar creates a significant disconnect, particularly for the children from these communities. Without public acknowledgment of their cultural celebrations, minority students may experience a diminished sense of inclusion in the national narrative. This absence within the school system not only limits opportunities for cultural expression but also contributes to feelings of marginalisation and cultural invisibility, ultimately affecting students' sense of belonging and identity within the broader society.

Data from the National Strategy for Pre-University Education 2021–2026²⁸ indicate that the teaching of Roma and/or migrant history and culture remains insufficiently integrated into core school subjects

²⁷ Article 12 of Law No. 96/2012, dated 09.11.2017, “On the Protection of National Minorities in the Republic of Albania”.

²⁸ Albanian Council of Ministers, *On the Approval of the National Education Strategy 2021–2026 and the Action Plan for Its Implementation*. Decision no. 621, dated 22.10.2021, of the Council of Ministers, <https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Draft-Strategjia-per-Arsimin-2021-2026.pdf>

such as history, civic or social education, literature, religion or ethics, art, music, and languages. While the strategy outlines initiatives to develop curricula in the languages of national minorities, it fails to provide concrete data on the number of children who actually receive instruction in their mother tongues. Compounding this issue is the limited cultural competence and training of teachers, many of whom lack adequate knowledge about national minority cultures, making it difficult to effectively incorporate minority perspectives into the teaching process.

Similarly, the National Action Plan for 2021–2025(29)²⁹ identifies the need to strengthen intercultural dialogue within schools. Since 2015, the quality and availability of teacher training across all levels of education have declined. This decline is particularly evident in teacher training related to managing multicultural classrooms, engaging with families from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, and promoting tolerance, equality, and intercultural interaction. Moreover, efforts to revise curricula at both the compulsory and upper-secondary levels—aimed at integrating intercultural values – have encountered significant challenges. Although some progress has been made – for example, twelve textbooks were revised in 2018 to better reflect Roma and Egyptian identities – these efforts remain limited in scope and impact.

This situation highlights the urgent need for more concrete and systemic measures to equip teachers with the necessary skills and resources to effectively manage and support diverse classrooms. Although the legal framework affirms the right to preserve and promote the cultural identities of national minorities, significant implementation gaps persist. Promoting the traditions and heritage of minority communities remains a substantial challenge in practice. The National Strategy for Culture 2021–2025 acknowledges this by supporting various cultural and academic initiatives aimed at protecting, documenting, and digitising the cultural heritage of

²⁹ Albanian Council of Ministers, (2021), *On the approval of the National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians, 2021–2025*, Decision no. 701, dated 18.11.2021, of the Council of Ministers, <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/vendim/2021/11/18/701/a92f26f9-3da7-4e78-af10-5ad130f085e3>

national minorities while explicitly aiming to prevent assimilationist practices that threaten their distinct identities³⁰.

Although some initiatives are supported by local authorities and various organisations, the promotion of the culture and identity of individuals belonging to national minorities has yet to become a consistent practice or a fully integrated component of pre-university education in Albania. The "Education Through Culture" program, as outlined in the National Strategy for Culture 2021–2025³¹, and it was developed through collaboration between cultural and educational institutions and is primarily focused on fostering appreciation for Albania's national tangible and intangible cultural heritage. However, this program largely overlooks the distinct cultural contributions of national minorities and does not prioritise their recognition or inclusion. This gap highlights the urgent need for a more inclusive and culturally responsive approach within pre-university education – one that actively incorporates and celebrates the diverse cultural identities of Albania's national minorities as an essential part of the country's educational and societal development.

3.2. Ethnic Identity

The ethnic identity of a national minority is shaped by three interrelated dimensions: the minority group's identification with the majority population among whom it resides, its sense of belonging to the broader society, and its position within the broader framework of interethnic relations and cultural dynamics³². Ethnicity itself is a multifaceted construct, encompassing a rich tapestry of cultural, social, and linguistic practices, shared ancestry or geographic origin, religious affiliations, and collective historical experiences. It is also

³⁰ Albanian Council of Ministers, (2019), *On the approval of the national strategy for culture, 2019–2025*, Decision no. 903, dated 24.12.2019, of the Council of Ministers, <http://qbz.gov.al/eli/vendim/2019/12/24/903>

³¹ Albanian Council of Ministers, (2019), *On the approval of the national strategy for culture*.

³² L. Gong, *Ethnic identity and identification with the majority group: Relations with national identity and self-esteem*, "International Journal of Intercultural Relations" 2007, Vol. 31, Issue 4, pp 503-523, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0147176707000235>

a deeply personal expression, often manifested through language, traditional dress, cuisine, dietary customs, observance of cultural or religious holidays, burial rituals, partner selection, religious symbols, and regional or community ties³³.

Albania stands out among European countries for its notable diversity of national minorities, presenting a model of coexistence that affirms the identity, language, ethnicity, religion, and cultural rights of all individuals. The adoption of the Law on the Protection of National Minorities in the Republic of Albania³⁴ marked a significant step by consolidating various minority groups under a unified legal framework as national minorities, thereby strengthening their recognition and protection within the national legal order.

In 2023, Albania conducted a national population census³⁵ (Institute of Statistics [INSTAT]). According to the published data, the self-declared population figures for national ethnic minorities were as follows:

- Greek: 23.485 individuals
- Macedonian: 2.281 individuals
- Montenegrin: 511 individuals
- Aromanian: 2.459 individuals
- Roma: 9.813 individuals
- Egyptian: 12.375 individuals
- Bosnian: 2.963 individuals
- Serbian: 584 individuals
- Bulgarian: 7.057 individuals

Albania's multiethnic landscape underscores the urgent need for proactive measures to prevent discrimination, beginning from the earliest stages of education. Schools and educators that embrace diversity play a crucial role in fostering multicultural values, which significantly shape immigrant and minority children's experiences

³³ M. Van der Tol, *Ethnic identity as a challenge to antidiscrimination law: protection, positionality and liminality*. "Ethnic and Racial Studies" 2024, Vol. 47(9), p. 1880-1899, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2024.2328322>

³⁴ Article 3 of Law no. 96/2012, dated 09.11.2017, "On the Protection of National Minorities in the Republic of Albania".

³⁵ INSTAT, *Albania Population and Housing Census 2023. Main Results*, <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/14303/cens-2023.pdf>

with discrimination and their development of ethnic identity³⁶. The education system acknowledges student diversity and relies on strategic guidelines issued annually by the relevant ministry. These directives guide school principals in formulating activity plans that promote diversity, inclusion, and multicultural awareness throughout the academic year. Such efforts not only contribute to improved academic outcomes but also support the meaningful integration of children from national minority communities.

However, minority students – particularly those from Roma, Aromanian, or Egyptian backgrounds – often face difficulties reconciling their ethnic identity with the dominant cultural expectations. When schools overlook the cultural heritage of these groups, including their history, cuisine, and traditions, students may experience a sense of exclusion. Studies have shown that the absence of ethnic representation in curricula and educational materials can adversely affect students' academic performance and self-esteem, further marginalising those who already face systemic barriers to inclusion³⁷.

3.3. Religious identity

Article 4 of the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities³⁸ affirms that “the Parties undertake to promote the necessary conditions for persons belonging to national minorities to preserve and develop their culture, and to maintain the essential elements of this identity, specifically religious belief, language, traditions, and cultural heritage.” Among these elements, religious belief holds particular significance. However, in Albania, the secular nature of the education system has limited the practical implementation of this right. Although the right to religious belief is

³⁶ C. Brown, H. Chu, *Discrimination, Ethnic Identity, and Academic Outcomes of Mexican Immigrant Children: The Importance of School Context*. “Child Development” 2012, Vol. 83, No. 5, p. 1477-1485, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/233211755>

³⁷ H. Avery, I. Hoxhallari, *From Policy to Practice: Roma Education in Albania and Sweden*, “Urban Review” 2017, Vol. 49, pp. 463-477, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11256-016-0394-5>

³⁸ Council of Europe, *The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*. “European Treaty Series” 1995, No. 157, <https://rm.coe.int/168007cdac>

formally recognised, it is not reflected in the educational curricula or institutional practices, as public schools are legally bound to maintain a secular character.

This exclusion of religious identity from school environments, while consistent with the principles of state secularism, presents challenges for students belonging to religious minorities. The absence of space for students to explore, express, or engage with their religious identities in educational settings can hinder their sense of belonging. This is especially relevant for communities such as the Roma or Bosnians, for whom religious observance plays a central role in cultural identity. In such cases, the lack of acknowledgement or accommodation in schools may contribute to a sense of marginalisation and cultural disconnection³⁹.

3.4. Linguistic identity

Speaking and writing in one's mother tongue is among the most natural and fundamental expressions of human identity. Language serves as a vital medium through which individuals convey their cultural heritage, values, and the collective identity of their national or ethnic community. As such, the right to use one's mother tongue is widely recognised as a fundamental human right and should be nurtured from the early childhood through the educational system. Language is not only a defining element of every ethnic group but also the most enduring repository of social tradition – bridging generations and preserving a community's historical continuity⁴⁰. For this reason, the right to language imposes a clear obligation on state authorities to actively support and facilitate the use of minority languages.

Articles 5 and 6 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities⁴¹ underscore the duty of states to safeguard

³⁹ L. Djordjević, Z. Zaimi, *Commentary: The Law on Protection of National Minorities in the Republic of Albania*, "Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe" 2019, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 53-69.

⁴⁰ Gj. Shkurtaj, *Kultura e gjuhës sot. Përmbledhje studimesh dhe pjesë tekstesh universitare*, Tiranë 2022.

⁴¹ Council of Europe, *The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, "European Treaty Series" 1995, No. 157, Art. 5 and 6, <https://rm.coe.int/168007cdac>

the cultural, linguistic, and religious identities of minorities while promoting tolerance and intercultural dialogue. Similarly, the Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms that children have the right to use their own language, culture, and religion – even when these differ from the majority population in the country where they reside⁴².

Language, as a central component of both human nature and cultural identity, holds profound emotional and symbolic value. For linguistic minority communities, maintaining their language is essential not only for preserving their unique group identity but also for resisting marginalisation, exclusion, and cultural erosion⁴³. The right to language thus plays a crucial role in affirming minority identity and ensuring full inclusion and participation in society.

Article 13 of the law on the protection of national minorities in the Republic of Albania guarantees the right of individuals belonging to national minorities to receive education in their mother tongue, stating: “Persons belonging to a national minority enjoy the right to learn the language of the minority.” Despite this legal recognition, Albania has made limited progress in advancing language rights compared to other Western Balkan countries. As Feta (2019) observes, Albania remains among the slowest in the region in implementing effective measures to protect linguistic diversity⁴⁴. Notably, it is the only Council of Europe member state in the Western Balkans that has yet to sign the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Moreover, the Fifth Periodic Report submitted by Albania acknowledges that the creation of necessary conditions for mother tongue instruction – such as the provision of textbooks, teacher training, and the establishment

⁴² United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, November 20, 1989, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

⁴³ United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues, (2017), *Language rights of linguistic minorities. A practical guide for implementation*. United Nations of Geneva, Switzerland, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Minorities/SR/LanguageRightsLinguisticMinorities_EN.pdf

⁴⁴ B. Feta, *The Protection of Minority Rights in Albania*, <https://www.eupolicyhub.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Policy-Briefs-Publication-Bledi-en-final.pdf>, [Retrieved: April 2025].

of minority language classes—is contingent upon decisions by the Council of Ministers, based on proposals from the Ministry of Education, and aligned with the national education legislation⁴⁵. This procedural requirement underscores the ongoing institutional and political challenges in operationalising the right to minority language education.

Despite Albania’s legal framework supporting the right of national minorities to receive education in their mother tongue, significant barriers persist in the effective implementation of minority language education. These challenges primarily stem from the lack of adequate educational materials and a shortage of qualified teachers. Although the Ministry of Education and Sports has emphasised the importance of mother-tongue instruction for national minorities, the Romani language remains undocumented and unstandardised⁴⁶. As a result, the development of the structured teaching materials, including textbooks for learning Romani, has yet to be realised. Moreover, the native history and geography textbooks have not been published for several minority groups, further hindering the inclusive education.

Higher education institutions in Albania currently lack the capacity to train teachers in minority languages, as relevant study programs have either been discontinued or suffer from low enrollment. This issue is particularly evident in the second-cycle master’s programs, which are legally required for conferring teaching qualifications but are not operational in the field of minority language instruction. An exception to this was the “Albanian and Romani Language” bachelor’s program offered at Aleksandër Xhuvani University in Elbasan, from which a small number of students graduated between 2015 and 2021. However, the absence of a corresponding master’s

⁴⁵ Council of Europe, *Fifth Report submitted by Albania ACFC/SR/V(2021)002 Pursuant to Article 25, paragraph 2 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, <https://rm.coe.int/5th-sr-albania-al/1680a2614d>, [Retrieved: April 2025].

⁴⁶ Albanian Ministry of Education and Sports, *On the determination of subjects taught in both Albanian and the mother tongue of national minority students in basic education in Albania*, Instruction no. 20, dated 19.07.2022. Official Gazette no. 111, year 2022, https://arsimiparauniversitar.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Udhezim-Nr.20.date_19.7.2022.pdf

program has prevented these graduates from acquiring formal teaching credentials in Romani. The program is now closed due to limited student interest, underscoring the structural challenges in sustaining minority language education⁴⁷.

3.5. Traditional identity

In today's increasingly diverse educational landscape, the inclusion of traditional identity for minority children is not merely a matter of equity – it is fundamental to their holistic development. Traditional identity, which encompasses language, culture, beliefs, and practices, plays a crucial role in shaping a child's self-concept and sense of belonging. For minority children, the recognition and affirmation of their cultural identity within educational settings can significantly enhance self-esteem, academic performance, and overall well-being⁴⁸.

By integrating traditional identities into the curriculum, schools can offer culturally responsive education that connects students' learning experiences with their cultural heritage. This approach not only increases engagement and motivation but also fosters a positive and inclusive school climate where diversity is acknowledged and valued. Such an environment supports intercultural understanding, strengthens peer relationships, and reduces experiences of marginalisation, thereby contributing to the broader goals of social inclusion and educational equity⁴⁹.

Incorporating traditional identity into education offers numerous advantages. It fosters social integration by helping minority children feel accepted and valued, which in turn enhances their peer

⁴⁷ The website of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education lacks information about the Romani language study program, <https://www.ascal.al/sq/lista-e-ial/programet-e-studimit>

⁴⁸ N. Gharaei, F. Fleischmann, K. Phalet, *National Identity Development Among Minority Youth: Longitudinal Relations with National Fit Perceptions and School Belonging*, "J. Youth Adolescence" 2024, Vol. 53, pp. 2746–2761, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-024-02036-0>

⁴⁹ L. Celeste, G. Baysu, K. Phalet, L. Meeussen, J. Kende, *Can school diversity policies reduce belonging and achievement gaps between minority and majority youth? Multiculturalism, colourblindness and assimilationism assessed*, "Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin" 2019, Vol. 45(11), pp. 1603-1618, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167219838577>

relationships. Moreover, an educational framework that reflects and honours traditional identities is essential for preserving minority cultures and languages. This approach empowers children to take pride in their heritage, motivating them to share it with future generations⁵⁰.

Nevertheless, challenges persist in achieving this goal. Many educational systems continue to prioritise mainstream cultural perspectives, often overlooking the traditions and languages of minority groups. This neglect can marginalise minority identities, limiting their representation in the classroom. Additionally, insufficient resources, such as qualified teachers proficient in minority languages and culturally relevant teaching materials, can impede the effective integration of traditional identities into the curriculum. Societal attitudes also present obstacles; discrimination and negative stereotypes can pressure minority children to conform to dominant cultural norms, sometimes at the expense of their own identities⁵¹.

To address these challenges, several strategies can be employed. Firstly, curricular development is essential. Educators and policymakers should work to create curricula that reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students by integrating traditional stories, languages, and practices into lessons across various subjects. Teacher training is equally important; providing educators with cultural competency training enables them to recognise and address biases while fostering supportive environments for all students.

Community engagement is another critical strategy. Schools can significantly benefit from collaborating with the local minority communities to understand their cultural values and practices. This collaboration can involve community members in developing educational programs that authentically reflect their identities. Additionally, celebrating cultural diversity through events and activities can enrich the school culture and foster pride in students' identities.

⁵⁰ European Commission, (2021), *European School Education Platform. Survey on cultural identities in education – Results*, <https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/discover/viewpoints/survey-cultural-identities-education-results>

⁵¹ P. Vedder, G. Horenczyk, K. Liebkind, G. Nickmans, *Ethno-culturally diverse education settings; problems, challenges and solutions*. "Educational Research Review" 2006, Vol. 1(2), pp. 157-168, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2006.08.007>

Ultimately, including traditional identity in the education of minority children is vital. It promotes not only academic success but also social integration and cultural preservation. By recognising and valuing these identities, educational institutions can create an environment that nurtures all students, paving the way for a more inclusive and harmonious society. However, effective implementation requires overcoming the existing challenges and adopting proactive strategies that embrace diversity, ensuring respect for all cultural backgrounds.

4. Challenges for strengthening the linguistic identity

Language education encompasses not only the process of learning one or more languages but also the broader responsibility of promoting and protecting the linguistic rights of all individuals impartially and equitably. In the Albanian education system, however, this principle is not fully realised for the national minority students. While the curriculum mandates the learning of the official language and one or two foreign languages (typically a primary and secondary foreign language), minority children are not afforded the option to study their mother tongue as part of this structure. The legal framework does not recognise or legitimise the right of minority students to select their own language as a second or additional language of instruction.

This exclusion contributes to the marginalisation of minority linguistic capital, which may be further degraded or delegitimised by the dominant social and political structures. Such dynamics are particularly prevalent in nation-states where national identity is closely tied to a single language and culture⁵². Access to the mother-tongue education plays a crucial role in enabling children to develop a strong sense of identity and belonging. When students are able to use their native language within educational settings, it affirms their cultural heritage and supports their personal and academic development.

⁵² D. Arpacik, *Language Education of Linguistically Minoritized Students: First Steps for Teachers*. "Theory, research, and action in urban education" 2025, Vol. 4, Issue 1, <https://traue.commons.gc.cuny.edu/volume-iv-issue-1-fall-2015/language-education-of-linguistically-minoritized-students-first-steps-for-teachers>

Multilingual education, as included in the Albanian national curriculum, should prioritise the development and support of minority languages. Ćatibušić refers to minority languages as “home languages,” emphasising that enhancing opportunities for their use, both within and beyond the family context, can help sustain linguistic ecosystems that promote multilingual development⁵³. In a country like Albania, where multilingualism is a common feature of the population, minority languages should be recognised as valuable social assets. Supporting these languages contributes to the students’ linguistic and cultural identity and promotes inclusion and social cohesion.

To achieve this, the adoption of supportive language policies is essential. Such policies would ensure equitable treatment of students in the classroom and affirm their right to education in their mother tongue. Although Albania has legally enshrined the promotion and protection of bilingualism, the implementation of these principles remains limited. The education system lacks sufficient human resources to deliver instruction in minority languages, and local administrative institutions often show little initiative in offering services in these languages.

Furthermore, despite a diverse media landscape, minority languages are largely absent from programming, further marginalising these communities. As Fang notes, language is a crucial component of identity and culture; preserving linguistic rights supports the self-esteem of minority groups and contributes to their success in society⁵⁴. Conversely, as Joshi and Eslami argue, “Depriving people of linguistic rights removes their power and denies their existence,” underscoring the urgency of implementing inclusive language policies in practice⁵⁵.

53 B. Ćatibušić, *Minority language development in early childhood: a study of siblings acquiring Bosnian and English in Ireland*, “TEANGA The Journal of Irish Association of Applied Linguistics” 2019, Vol. 10, <https://doi.org/10.35903/teanga.v10i075>

54 T. Fang, *How to Maintain a Minority Language through Education*, “Chinese Studies” 2017, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 1-11, DOI: 10.4236/chnstd.2017.61001.

55 P. Joshi, Z. Eslami, *Barriers to language maintenance and multilingual schooling: examining the language policy provisions in Nepal’s constitutions*, “Cogent Education” 2024, Vol 11, Issue 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2362013>

Conclusion

While Albania has established a legal framework to protect the educational rights of minority children, significant gaps persist both in the scope of the framework and in its practical implementation. Geographic disparities, limited resources, and inadequate teacher training continue to hinder the realisation of the mother-tongue education. These structural barriers are further exacerbated by the ongoing issues such as discrimination, segregation, and statelessness – challenges that disproportionately affect the Roma and Egyptian children. Although Albania's international commitments offer a solid foundation for upholding minority educational rights, the lack of robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms continues to impede meaningful progress. Bridging these gaps requires not only stronger application of the existing laws but also the improved data collection and the adoption of proactive, targeted measures to ensure equitable access to inclusive and high-quality education for all minority children.

Looking ahead, Albania must pursue a comprehensive, multi-faceted strategy to achieve full inclusion of minority children within the education system. Key actions should include the development of digital learning platforms that deliver instruction in minority languages, particularly in remote or underserved areas; the recruitment and specialised training of bilingual teachers; and the establishment of stronger, more collaborative partnerships between schools and minority communities. In addition, Albania should give serious consideration to ratifying the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Doing so would not only align national education policies with regional best practices but also reinforce the state's commitment to protecting the linguistic and cultural rights of its minority populations.